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SUBJECT: BENIN: POLITICAL UPDATE

REFERENCE: (A) 08 COTONOU 201; (B) 08 COTONOU 795 AND PREVIOUS; (C)  
COTONOU 186

11. (U) SUMMARY: Politicians have engaged in early and thinly veiled campaigning ahead of the 2011 presidential election. Some members of the contentious opposition have solicited the candidacy of Bio Tchane, a former Minister of Finance in Kerekou's administration, to challenge President Yayi in the 2011 presidential election while President Yayi's ministers have increased outreach efforts to support his agenda and publicize his achievements. Yayi has secured a very unstable majority in the National Assembly with the defection of a few deputies from the opposition G-13 to the Pro-Yayi Front Cowry for the Emergence of Benin (FCBE) and vice-versa. Tensions and personalized attacks are prevalent in the National Assembly where the government tries to push outstanding bills. END SUMMARY.

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Early Electoral  
Campaigning  
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12. (SBU) President Yayi and his ministers have recently started to make extensive trips nationwide to kick off community projects and to attend groundbreaking ceremonies for infrastructure projects. Though these trips are consistent with Yayi's economic agenda for the emergence of Benin, many political observers view them as part of an overall strategy to increase popularity and engineer support for the 2011 presidential election. A case in point is the April mobilization of Yayi's cabinet to select cultivable lands and equip local communities with agricultural machines as part of the implementation of the government's ambitious agricultural development project. This event, which received heavy media coverage, was regarded by the opposition as a precocious pre electoral campaign activity. A few suspicious politicians blame Yayi for allegedly using government projects and means for electioneering. (Ref A).

13. (SBU) The G-13, made up of business men, is frustrated inasmuch as Yayi has prevented it from accessing illegal sources of funding through anti-corruption measures he has taken since he became president. As a rule, the opposition's early electoral campaigning is more obvious, and very often takes the form of personalized attacks on Yayi and vitriolic statements against his policies (Ref B).

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Opposition prepares a Challenger  
for the 2011 Presidential Elections  
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¶4. (U) On April 26, Wallis Zoumarou, a FCBE deputy who defected in December 2008 from this group and joined the G-13 announced on television the candidacy of Bio Abdoulaye Tchane, a former Minister of Finance in Kerekou's administration, in the 2011 presidential elections and pledged that he would support him. Likewise, the G-13 officially declared its support for Bio Tchane's candidacy (in the 2011 presidential race) and has started coordinating marches supporting him in the north of Benin.

¶5. (U) On the margins of the signature of a West-African Development Bank (BOAD) loan agreement for a road construction in northern Benin, Abdoulaye Bio Tchane, the president of the BOAD and former President Kerekou's Minister of Finance told the press that he was aware Beninese were concerned about his candidacy in the 2011 presidential election. He said that he could not speak to the issue since elections were still two years ahead. However, everybody has regarded his trip to Benin as a sign that he would join the race in ¶2011. Many politicians concede that Bio Tchane will be a serious challenger to president Yayi, in consideration of his economic background and the strategy that politicians put in place to rally supporters for him.

¶6. (U) The USD 16 million that the BOAD granted Benin is meant for the restoration and asphaltting of the road linking Djougou to Ouake in northwestern Benin, Department of Donga, Bio Tchane's home district. It is clear that this move will increase his popularity in this particular area because possible supporters will likely credit him with this development project. Also, in early February, Bio Tchane made a trip to Djougou, a neighbor city to his hometown (Semere, located a few miles away), to gauge his popularity. It is noteworthy that Yayi engaged in a similar exercise prior to his

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candidacy in the March 2006 presidential election, launching several BOAD-funded projects and engaging local communities, which tremendously increased his popularity.

¶7. (U) Begin biographic note: Aboudoulaye Bio Tchane was born in 1952, in Northwest Benin. After primary and secondary school education, he travelled to France where he obtained a masters degree in economics. Later on, he obtained a diploma in Islamic Banking. Then Director of the Central Bank of West African States (BCEAO) Charles Konan Bani named him Vice Governor of the bank, where he worked from 1992 to 1998, when former president Kerekou appointed him Minister of Economy and Finance in his government. In January 2002 he was named African Director for the International Monetary Fund. In January 2008, he was appointed President of the BOAD by country members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), replacing Yayi Boni who won the presidency in March 2006. He is divorced and has three children. End note.

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Deputies' Defection  
sparks Polemics  
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¶8. (SBU) On April 21, Rachidi Gbamadassi, an outspoken and fierce opponent to president Yayi and active member of the G-13, announced in a press conference his defection from this group to the FCBE. His unexpected departure from the G-13 sparked fanciful rumors by politicians and the local press. One of these rumors says that he was allegedly bribed into joining the FCBE with USD 4 million (CFA 2 billion). Some FCBE members have viewed this affinity with the FCBE in an unfavorable light since Gbadamassi is a controversial business man and political figure. As the Mayor of Parakou, he faced charges in the November 2005 murder of Severin Coovi, President of Parakou's Court of Appeals. He was arrested and held in custody for five months before his temporary release in April 2006. Conversely, FCBE's Deputy Chabi Tokou Dare resigned from FCBE and sided with the

G 13 in April, complaining about FCBE methods.

¶9. (SBU) Developments in the National Assembly have indicated a possible alliance of the Renaissance du Benin party (RB) and the FCBE since December 2008 when Rosine Soglo, the president of the RB, pushed her party into adopting the 2009 budget and more recently when she backed the adoption of the bill on the LEPI (Ref C). A source close to the president of the party confirmed to post that an undermining conflict within the party opposed the RB group willing to join FCBE and those RB members who wanted to stick to the opposition G-4. The first group backs Galiou Soglo, Rosine's youngest son and Yayi's minister of Youth, Sports and Leisure who entered the government in June 2007. While the RB complained that Yayi did not consult them before appointing him. Rosine is said to be putting pressure on the RB to have it allied with the FCBE. The opposing group within the party, led by Lehady Soglo, Rosine's eldest son and Deputy Major of Cotonou, chooses to stay with the G-4 because he does not trust Yayi. The issue is pitting factions of the Soglo family against one another.

¶10. (SBU) COMMENT: No one can predict the outcome of the 2011 presidential election because of constantly shifting political tides in Benin. Political scientists and journalists have ventured to present various scenarios based on fragile hypotheses. However, all agree that if Bio Tchane runs in the 2011 race, he will be a serious contender. Post will provide further comment on this issue as the political situation develops.

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